RECORDS OF THE GRAND HISTORIAN: HAN DYNASTY II

REVISED EDITION

By Sima Qian

Translated by Burton Watson

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SHI JI 129: THE BIOGRAPHIES OF THE MONEY-MAKERS[1]

Though only commoners with no special ranks or titles, they were able, without interfering with the government or hindering the activities of the people, to increase their wealth by making the right moves at the right time. Wise men will find something to learn from them. Thus I made "The Biographies of the Money-makers".

Lao Zi has said that under the ideal form of government, "though states exist side by side, so close that they can hear the crowing of each other's cocks and the barking of each other's dogs, the people of each state will savour their own food, admire their own clothing, be content with their own customs, and delight in their own occupations, and will grow old and die without ever wandering abroad."[2] Yet if one were to try to apply this type of government, striving to drag the present age back to the conditions of primitive times and to stop up the eyes and ears of the people, it is doubtful that one would have much chance of success!

The Grand Historian remarks: I know nothing about the times of Shen Nong and before but, judging by what is recorded in the *Odes* and *Documents*, from the age of Emperor Shun and the Xia dynasty down to the present, ears and eyes have always longed for the ultimate in beautiful sounds and forms, mouths have desired to taste the best in grass-fed and grain-fed animals, bodies have delighted in ease and comfort, and hearts have swelled with pride at the glories of power and ability. So long have these habits been allowed to permeate the lives of the people that, though one were to go from door to door preaching the subtle

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[1]The title of the chapter, *huozhi*, literally "wealth increasing", is taken from Confucius' remark about his disciple Zigong (discussed in this chapter): "Ce (Zigong) does not acquiesce in his fate and his wealth increases" (*Analects* XI, 17). The chapter, containing as it does a great many technical terms and details of the economic life of the Han, is one of the most difficult in the *Shi ji*, and commentators differ on numerous points of interpretation.

[2]Lao Zi, *Daode jing* 80.

arguments of the Taoists, he could never succeed in changing them. Therefore the highest type of ruler accepts the nature of the people, the next best leads the people to what is beneficial, the next gives them moral instruction, the next forces them to be orderly, and the very worst kind enters into competition with them.[3]

The region west of the mountains is rich in timber, bamboo, paper mulberry, hemp, oxtails for banner tassels, jade and other precious stones. That east of the mountains abounds in fish, salt, lacquer, silk, singers, and beautiful women. The area south of the Yangtze produces camphor wood, catalpa, ginger, cinnamon, gold, tin, lead ore, cinnabar, rhinoceros horns, tortoise shell, pearls of various shapes, and elephant tusks and hides, while that north of Longmen and Jieshi is rich in horses, cattle, sheep, felt, furs, tendons, and horns. Mountains from which copper and iron can be extracted are found scattered here and there over thousands of miles of the empire, like chessmen on a board. In general, these are the products of the empire. All of them are commodities coveted by the people of China, who according to their various customs use them for their bedding, clothing, food, and drink, fashioning from them the goods needed to supply the living and bury the dead.

Society obviously must have farmers before it can eat; foresters, fishermen, miners, etc., before it can make use of natural resources; craftsmen before it can have manufactured goods; and merchants before they can be distributed. But once these exist, what need is there for government directives, mobilizations of labour, or periodic assemblies? Each man has only to be left to utilize his own abilities and exert his strength to obtain what he wishes. Thus, when a commodity is very cheap, it invites a rise in price; when it is very expensive, it invites a reduction. When each person works away at his own occupation and delights in his own business then, like water flowing downward, goods will naturally flow forth ceaselessly day and night without having been summoned, and the people will produce commodities without having been asked. Does this not tally with reason? Is it not a natural result?

The *Book of Zhou* says, "If the farmers do not produce, there will be a shortage of food; if the artisans do not produce, there will be a shortage of

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[3] A reference to Emperor Wu's economic policies, which put the government officials into competition with the people for profit. This whole chapter must be read in the light of the historian's earlier description of economic measures and conditions in "The Treatise on the Balanced Standard".

manufactured goods; if the merchants do not produce, then the three precious things will not circulate; if the foresters, fishermen, miners, etc., do not produce, there will be a shortage of wealth, and if there is a shortage of wealth the resources of the mountains and lakes cannot be exploited.[4] These four classes are the source of the people's clothing and food. When the source is large, there will be plenty for everyone, but when the source is small, there will be scarcity. On the one hand, the state will be enriched, and on the other, powerful families will be enriched. Poverty and wealth are not the sort of things that are arbitrarily handed to men or taken away: the clever have a surplus; the stupid never have enough.

At the beginning of the Zhou dynasty, when the Grand Duke Wang was enfeoffed with Yingqiu in the state of Qi, where the land was damp and brackish and the inhabitants few, he encouraged the women workers, developed the craft industries to the highest degree, and opened up a trade in fish and salt. As a result, men and goods were reeled into the state like skeins of thread; they converged upon it like spokes about a hub. Soon Qi was supplying caps and sashes, clothes and shoes to the whole empire, and the lords of the area between the sea and Mt. Tai adjusted their sleeves and journeyed to its court to pay their respects.

Later, the power of the state of Qi fell into decline, but Master Guan Zhong restored it to prosperity by establishing the nine bureaus for controlling the flow of money. As a result Duke Huan of Qi (685-643 BC) was able to become a dictator; nine times he called together the other feudal lords for conferences and set the empire to rights again. Moreover, Guan Zhong himself, though only a court minister, owned the mansion called the Three Returnings,[5] and his wealth exceeded that of the lord of a great feudal kingdom. Thus the state of Qi remained rich and powerful through the reigns of Wei and Xuan (378-323 BC).

Therefore it is said, "Only when the granaries are full can people appreciate rites and obligations; only when they have enough food and clothing do they think about glory and disgrace."[6] Rites are born of plenty and are abandoned in

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[4] No such quotation is found in the section of the *Book of Documents* devoted to the Zhou dynasty or in the *Yizhou shu*. The "three precious things" are usually identified as the products of the other three classes, i.e., agricultural products, manufactured goods, and the products of mountains, lakes, etc.

[5] On the "Three Returnings" see the biography of the Marquis of Pingjin, p. 190, note 1.

[6] The quotation is found in the opening paragraph of the *Guan zi*, a text which purports to represent the sayings and theories of Guan Zhong.

time of want. When superior men become rich, they delight in practising virtue; but when mean-minded men are rich, they long only to exercise their power. As fish by nature dwell in the deepest pools and wild beasts congregate in the most secluded mountains, so benevolence and righteousness attach themselves to a man of wealth. So long as a rich man wields power, he may win greater and greater eminence, but once his power is gone, his guests and retainers will all desert him and take no more delight in his company. This is even more the case among barbarians.

The proverb says, "The young man with a thousand catties of gold does not meet death in the market place."[7] This is no idle saying. So it is said,

> Jostling and joyous,
> The whole world comes after profit;
> Racing and rioting,
> After profit the whole world goes!

If even the king of a land of 1,000 chariots, the lord of 10,000 households, or the master of 100 dwellings must worry about poverty, how much more so the common peasant whose name is enroled in the tax collector's list?

In former times when King Goujian of Yue (496-465 BC) was surrounded on Mt. Kuaiji by the armies of the state of Wu and was in great difficulty, he followed the advice of Fan Li and Jiran. Jiran said, "If you know there is going to be a battle, you must make preparations beforehand, and for ordinary use you must know what goods are needed in each season. When you understand these two necessities clearly, then you can perceive how all kinds of goods should be disposed. When Jupiter is in the western portion of the sky, which is dominated by the element metal, there will be good harvests; when it is in the northern portion dominated by water, there will be destruction by floods; when it is in the eastern portion dominated by wood, there will be famine; and when in the southern portion dominated by fire, there will be drought. When there is a drought, that is the time to start laying away a stock of boats; and when there is

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[7] Commentators generally take this to mean that a son of a wealthy family has enough moral training to avoid breaking the law and thus incurring execution in the market place. Obviously, however, it may also be interpreted more cynically to mean that money can buy one's way out of any difficulties.

a flood, that is the time to start buying up carts. This is the principle behind the use of goods.

"Every six years there will be a good harvest, every six years there will be a drought, and every twelve years there will be one great famine. If grain is sold as low as twenty cash a picul, then the farmers will suffer, but if it goes as high as ninety cash, then those in secondary occupations will suffer. If the merchants and others in secondary occupations suffer, then they will produce no goods, while if the farmers suffer they will cease to clear their fields. If, however, the price does not go over eighty cash nor fall below thirty, then both farmers and those in secondary occupations will benefit. If the price of grain is kept level and goods are fairly distributed, then there will be no shortages in the customs barriers and markets. This is the way to govern a country.

"The principle of storing goods is to try to get commodities which can be preserved for a long time without damage or depreciation[8] and can be easily exchanged for other things. Do not store up commodities that are likely to rot or spoil, and do not hoard expensive articles. If you study the surpluses and shortages of the market, you can judge how much a commodity will be worth. When an article has become extremely expensive, it will surely fall in price, and when it has become extremely cheap, then the price will begin to rise. Dispose of expensive goods as though they were so much filth and dirt; buy up cheap goods as though they were pearls and jade. Wealth and currency should be allowed to flow as freely as water!"

King Goujian followed this advice for the next ten years until the state of Yue became rich and he was able to give generous gifts to his fighting men. As a result, his soldiers were willing to rush into the face of the arrows and stones of the enemy as though they were thirsty men going to drink their fill; in the end King Goujian took his revenge upon the powerful forces of Wu, demonstrated his military might to the other states of China, and came to be known as one of the Five Hegemons.

Fan Li, having helped to wipe out the shame of Yue's defeat at Kuaiji, sighed and said, "Of Jiran's seven strategies, Yue made use of five and achieved its desires. They have already been put into practice in the state. Now I would like to try using them for my own family."

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[8] Following the reading in the *Suoyin* and *Zhengyi* commentaries.

Then he got into a little boat and sailed down the Yangtze and through the lakes. He changed his family name and personal name and visited Qi, where he was known as Chiyi Zipi, the "Adaptable Old Wine-skin". Later he went to Tao, where he was called Lord Zhu. He observed that Tao, located in the middle of the empire, with feudal lords passing back and forth in all directions, was a centre for the exchange of goods. He therefore established his business there, storing away goods, looking for a profitable time to sell, and not making demands upon others. (Thus one who is good at running a business must know how to select men and take advantage of the times.) In the course of nineteen years Fan Li, or Lord Zhu, as he was now called, three times accumulated fortunes of 1,000 catties of gold, and twice he gave them away among his poor friends and distant relations. This is what is meant by a rich man who delights in practising virtue. Later, when he became old and frail, he turned over his affairs to his sons and grandsons, who carried on and improved the business until the family fortune had reached 100,000,000 cash. Therefore, when people speak of rich men they always mention Tao Zhugong, Lord Zhu of Tao.

Zigong, after studying with Confucius, retired and held office in the state of Wey. By buying up, storing, and selling various goods in the region of Cao and Lu, he managed to become the richest among Confucius' seventy disciples. While Yuan Xian, another of the Master's disciples, could not get even enough chaff and husks to satisfy his hunger, and lived hidden away in a tiny lane, Zigong rode about with a team of four horses attended by a mounted retinue, bearing gifts of bundles of silk to be presented to the feudal lords, and whatever state he visited the ruler never failed to descend into the courtyard and greet him as an equal. It was due to Zigong's efforts that Confucius' fame was spread over the empire. Is this not what we mean when we say that a man who wields power may win greater and greater eminence?

Bai Gui was a native of Zhou. During the time of Marquis Wen of Wei (403-387 BC), Li Ke stressed full utilization of the powers of the land, but Bai Gui delighted in watching for opportunities presented by the changes of the times.

> What others throw away, I take;
> What others take, I give away,

he said. "When the year is good and the harvest plentiful, I buy up grain and sell silk and lacquer; when cocoons are on the market, I buy up raw silk and sell

grain. When the reverse marker of Jupiter is in the sign *mao*,[9] the harvest will be good, but the following year the crops will do much worse. When it reaches the sign *wu*, there will be a drought, but the next year will be fine. When it reaches the sign *you*, there will be good harvests, followed the next year by a falling off. When it reaches the sign *zi*, there will be a great drought. The next year will be fine and later there will be floods. Thus the cycle revolves again to the sign *mao*."

By observing these laws, he was able to approximately double his stores of grain each year. When he wanted to increase his money supply, he bought cheap grain, and when he wanted to increase his stock, he bought up high-grade grain. He ate and drank the simplest fare, controlled his appetites and desires, economized on clothing, and shared the same hardships as his servants and slaves, and when he saw a good opportunity, he pounced on it like a fierce animal or a bird of prey. "As you see," he said, "I manage my business affairs in the same way that the statesmen Yi Yin and Lü Shang planned their policies, the military experts Sun Zi and Wu Zi deployed their troops, and the Legalist philosopher Shang Yang carried out his laws. Therefore, if a man does not have wisdom enough to change with the times, courage enough to make decisions, benevolence enough to know how to give and take, and strength enough to stand his ground, though he may wish to learn my methods, I will never teach them to him!"

Hence, when the world talks of managing a business it acknowledges Bai Gui as the ancestor of the art. Bai Gui tried out his theories in practice, and his experiments proved successful. He knew what he was talking about.

Yi Dun rose to prominence by producing salt in ponds, while Guo Zong of Handan made a business of smelting iron, and their wealth equalled that of the ruler of a kingdom.

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[9] Since Jupiter takes approximately twelve years to complete one cycle of the heavens, the years of the cycle were designated by the twelve signs that marked the division of the horizon, depending upon which portion of the sky Jupiter was in. But because Jupiter appeared to revolve counterclockwise through the sky, and the order of the twelve signs ran clockwise, an imaginary marker, called *suiyin* or *taiyin*, was postulated, which revolved in the opposite direction from Jupiter. As this works out, when the reverse marker was in *mao* (east), Jupiter was in *zi* (north); when the marker was in *wu* (south), Jupiter was in *you* (west); when the marker was in *you* (west), Jupiter was in *wu* (south); and when the marker was in *zi* (north), Jupiter was in *mao* (east). Hence Bai Gui is saying that when Jupiter is in the north or south, there will be good harvests; when it is in the west there will be drought; and when it is in the east there will be a great drought. The reader may compare this with Jiran's laws above.

Wuzhi Luo raised domestic animals, and when he had a large number, he sold them and bought rare silks and other articles which he secretly sent as gifts to the king of the Rong barbarians. The king of the Rong repaid him ten times the original cost and sent him domestic animals until Wuzhi Luo had so many herds of horses and cattle he could only estimate their number roughly by the valleyful. The First Emperor of the Qin ordered that Wuzhi Luo be granted the same honours as a feudal lord and allowed him to join the ministers in seasonal audiences at court.

There was also the case of a widow named Qing of the region of Ba and Shu. Her ancestors got possession of some cinnabar caves and were able to monopolize the profits from them for several generations until they had acquired an inestimable amount of wealth. Qing, although only a widow, was able to carry on the business and used her wealth to buy protection for herself so that others could not mistreat or impose upon her. The First Emperor of the Qin, considering her a virtuous woman, treated her as a guest and built the Nühuaiqing Terrace in her honour.

Wuzhi Luo was a simple country man who looked after herds, while Qing was only a widow living far off in the provinces, and yet both were treated with as much respect as though they had been the lords of a state of 10,000 chariots, and their fame spread all over the world. Was this not because of their wealth?

After the Han rose to power, the barriers and bridges were opened and the restrictions on the use of the resources of mountains and lakes were relaxed. As a result, the rich traders and great merchants travelled all around the empire distributing their wares to every corner so that everyone could buy what he wanted. At the same time the powerful families of the great provincial clans and former feudal lords were moved to the capital.

The area within the Pass,[10] from the Qian and Yong rivers east to the Yellow River and Mt. Hua, is a region of rich and fertile fields stretching 1,000 *li*. Judging from the tribute exacted by Emperor Shun and the rulers of the Xia dynasty, these were already at that time considered to be among the finest fields. Later the ancestor of the house of Zhou, Gongliu, made his home in Bin in the region; his descendants Dawang and Wangji lived in the area called Qi, King

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[10] In the following description of the various geographical areas of the empire and the customs of the people in each, there are no indications of tense and it is not certain whether Sima Qian is talking about the customs of older times or those of his own day. I have in most cases translated as though he meant the latter.

Wen built the city of Feng; and King Wu ruled from Hao. Therefore the people of the region still retain traces of the customs they learned under these ancient rulers. They are fond of agriculture, raise the five grains, take good care of their fields, and regard it as a serious matter to do wrong.

Later, Dukes Wen and Mu[11] of Qin (765-621 BC) fixed the capital of their state at Yong, which was on the main route for goods being brought out of both Long and Shu and was a centre for merchants. Dukes Xian and Xiao (384-338 BC) moved the Qin capital to the city of Yue. The city of Yue drove back the Rong and Di barbarians in the north and in the east opened up communication with the states that had been created out of the former state of Jin. It too was a centre for great merchants. Kings Wu and Zhao (310-251 BC) made their capital at Xianyang, and it was this site that the Han took over and used for its own capital, Chang'an. People poured in from all parts of the empire to congregate in the towns established at the imperial tombs around Chang'an, converging on the capital like the spokes of a wheel. The land area is small and the population numerous, and therefore the people have become more and more sophisticated and crafty and have turned to secondary occupations such as trade to make their living.

South of this region are the provinces of Ba and Shu, which also contain rich fields and produce large quantities of gardenias for making dye, ginger, cinnabar, copper, iron, and bamboo and wooden implements. In the south these provinces control the regions of Dian and Po, the latter noted for its young slaves. Nearby on the west are the regions of Qiong and Zuo, the latter famous for its horses and oxtails. Though the area is hemmed in on all four sides by natural barriers, there are plank roadways built along the sides of the mountains for 1,000 *li* so that there is no place that cannot be reached. All these roads are squeezed together into one in the narrow defile running between the Bao and Ye rivers. By means of such roads, areas which have a surplus may exchange their goods for the things which they lack.

North of the capital area are the provinces of Tianshui, Longxi, Beidi, and Shang, whose customs are the same as those of the area within the Pass. To the west there are profits to be gained among the Qiang barbarians, while to the north are the herds of the Rong and Di barbarians, which are one of the riches of the empire. Nevertheless, the region is mountainous and inaccessible and the

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[11] Omitting the name of Duke Xiao, which erroneously appears between Wen and Mu in present texts.

only route out of it is that which leads to the capital.

Thus the region within the Pass occupies about a third of the area of the empire. The inhabitants represent only three tenths of the total population, but they possess six tenths of the wealth of the nation.

In ancient times the men of the state of Emperor Yao made their capital in Hedong, those of the Yin dynasty established their capital in Henei, and those of the Zhou dynasty in Henan. These three regions stand like the legs of a tripod in the centre of the empire and were used as the sites of their capitals by the successive dynasties, each of which lasted for several hundred or even 1,000 years. The region is narrow and constricted and the population large. Since the capitals of the various dynasties served as gathering places for the feudal lords, the people are very thrifty and experienced in the ways of the world.

Yang and Pingyang[12] in Hedong have customarily traded with the area of Qin and the Di barbarians in the west and with Zhong and Dai in the north. Zhong and Dai are situated north of the old city of Shi. They border the lands of the Xiongnu and are frequently raided by the barbarians. The inhabitants are proud and stubborn, high-spirited and fond of feats of daring and evil, and do not engage in agriculture or trade. Because the region is so close to the territory of the northern barbarians, armies have frequently been sent there, and when supplies were transported to them from the central states, the people were often able to profit from the surplus. The inhabitants have mingled with the barbarians, and their customs are by no means uniform. From the time before the state of Jin was divided into three parts they were already a source of trouble because of their violent temperament. King Wuling of Zhao (325-299 BC) did much to encourage this trait, and the inhabitants today still retain the ways they developed when they were under the rule of Zhao. The merchants of Yang and Pingyang roam through the region and obtain whatever goods they want.

Wen and Zhi in Henei have customarily traded with Shangdang in the west and Zhao and Zhongshan in the north. The soil in Zhongshan is barren and the population large. Even today at Sandy Hill are to be found the descendants of the people who took part in the decadent revels of Emperor Zhou, the last ruler of the Yin dynasty, who had his summer palace there. The people are of an impetuous nature and are always looking for some cunning and clever way to make a living. The men gather together to play games, sing sad songs, and lament. When they really put their minds to business, they go out in bands to

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[12] Omitting the place name Chen, which does not seem to belong here.

rob and kill, and in their spare time they loot graves, think up ways to flatter and deceive others or, dressing up in beautiful array, become singers and actors. The women play upon the large lute and trip about in dancing slippers, visiting the homes of the noble and rich to sell their favours or becoming concubines in the palaces of the feudal lords all over the empire.

Handan, situated between the Zhang and Yellow rivers, is a city of major importance. In the north it has communications with Yan and Zhuo, and on the south with the regions of the old states of Zheng and Wey. The customs of Zheng and Wey are similar to those of Zhao except that, since they are located nearer to Liang and Lu, the people are somewhat more sedate and take pride in virtuous conduct. The inhabitants of Yewang were moved there from their city on the Pu River when the latter was taken over by the state of Qin (207 BC). They are high-spirited and given to feats of daring, traits which mark them as former subjects of the state of Wey.

Yan, situated between the Gulf of Bohai and Jieshi, is also a major city. The region of Yan communicates with Qi and Zhao in the south, borders the lands of the Xiongnu in the northeast, and extends as far as Shanggu and Liaodong, a distant and remote area, sparsely populated and often subject to barbarian raids. On the whole the customs are similar to those of Zhao and Dai, but the people are as fierce as hawks and exercise little forethought. The region is rich in fish, salt, jujubes, and chestnuts. On the north it adjoins the Wuhuan and Fuyu tribes and on the east it controls the profits derived from trade with the Huimo, Chaoxian (Korean), and Zhenpan peoples.

Luoyang in the region of Henan trades with Qi and Lu to the east and with Liang and Chu to the south.

The region south of Mt. Tai is the former state of Lu and that north of the mountain is Qi. Qi is bounded by mountains and sea, a fertile area stretching 1,000 *li*, suitable for growing mulberry and hemp. The population is large and produces beautifully patterned silks and other textiles, fish, and salt. Linzi, the capital, situated between the sea and Mt. Tai, is a city of major importance. The people are by nature generous and easy-going, of considerable intelligence, and fond of debate. They are very attached to the land and dislike turmoil and uprising. They are timid in group warfare but brave in single combat, which accounts for the large number of highway robbers among them. On the whole, however, they have the ways of a great nation. All the five classes of people (scholars, farmers, travelling merchants, artisans, and resident traders) are to be found among them.

Zou and Lu border the Zhu and Si rivers and still retain the ways which they learned when they were ruled by the duke of Zhou. They are fond of Confucian learning and proficient in matters of ritual, which makes them very punctilious. Mulberries and hemp are grown to some extent, but no resources are to be gained from forests or lakes. Land is scarce and the population numerous, so that the people are very frugal; they are much afraid of committing crimes and give a wide berth to evil. In later days, however, as the state has declined, they have become very fond of trade and are even more assiduous than the men of Zhou in pursuing profit.

East of the Hong Canal and north of the Mang and Dang mountains as far as the marsh of Juye is the region of the old states of Liang and Song. Tao and Suiyang are the most important cities in the area. In ancient times Emperor Yao built his pleasure palace at Chengyang, Emperor Shun fished in the Lei Marsh, and King Tang settled in Bo, so that the people still retain traces of the customs they learned from these former sage rulers. They are grave in demeanour, devoted to agricultural pursuits, and include a large number of true gentlemen. Though there are no riches to be gained from the mountains and rivers, the people are willing to put up with poor clothing and food and even manage to store up a surplus.

The regions of Yue and Chu are divided into three areas which differ in their customs. From the Huai River north to Pei, Chen, Runan, and Nan provinces is the area of western Chu. The people are very volatile and quickly give vent to their anger. The land is barren and there is little surplus to be stored up. Jiangling occupies the site of Ying, the old capital of the state of Chu. To the west it communicates with Wu and Ba and in the east draws upon the resources of the Yunmeng lakes. Chen is situated on what used to be the border between Chu and the old empire of the Xia dynasty and carries on a trade in fish and salt. The population therefore includes a large number of merchants. The people of the districts of Xu, Tong, and Qulü are honest and strict and pride themselves on keeping their promises.

From the city of Pengcheng east to Donghai, Wu, and Guangling is the region of eastern Chu. The customs are similar to those of Xu and Tong. From the districts of Qu and Zeng on north, however, the customs are similar to those of Qi, while from the Zhe and Yangtze rivers on south, they resemble those of Yue. Helu, the ancient king of the state of Wu (725-702 BC), the lord of Chunshen (third century BC), and Liu Pi, the king of Wu in Han times, all did their best to attract wandering scholars and protégés to the city of Wu. The city

enjoys the rich salt resources derived from the sea in the east, copper from the Zhang Mountains, and the benefits from the three mouths of the Yangtze and the Five Lakes nearby, and is the most important city in the area east of the Yangtze.

Hengshan, Jiujiang, Jiangnan, Yuzhang, and Changsha make up the region of southern Chu. The customs of the people are generally similar to those of western Chu. Shouchun, which the Chu kings used as their capital after they moved from Ying, is the most important city in the area. The district of Hefei receives goods transported down both the Huai River in the north and the Yangtze in the south and is a centre for the shipping of hides, dried fish, and lumber. The customs of the people have become mixed with those of the Min and Yue tribes. Thus the men of southern Chu are fond of fancy phrases and clever at talking, but what they say can seldom be trusted. Jiangnan, the area just south of the Yangtze, is low and damp, and even hardy young men die early there. It produces large quantities of bamboo and timber. Yuzhang produces gold and Changsha produces lead ore, but the quantity is so small that, though it exists, it seldom repays the cost of extraction.

From the Nine Peaks and Cangwu south to Daner the customs are in general similar to those of Jiangnan, though with a large admixture of the customs of the Yang and Yue people. Panyu is the most important city in the area, being a centre for pearls, rhinoceros horn, tortoise shell, fruit, and cloth.

Yingchuan and Nanyang were the home of the people of the ancient Xia dynasty. The Xia people valued loyalty and simplicity in government, and the influence of the Xia kings is still to be seen in the ways of the inhabitants of the region, who are warmhearted and sincere. In the latter days of the Qin dynasty the government moved large numbers of lawbreakers to the region of Nanyang. Nanyang communicates on the west with the area within the Pass through the Wu Pass, and with Hanzhong through the Xun Pass, and from the east and south it receives goods by way of the Han, Yangtze, and Huai rivers. Yuan is the most important city in the region. The customs are rather heterogeneous; the people are fond of business and there are many merchants among them. The local bosses in the area work in cooperation with their counterparts in Yingchuan. Even today people refer to the inhabitants of the entire region as "men of Xia".

Various products are rare in one part of the empire and plentiful in another part. For example, it is the custom of the people east of the mountains to use salt extracted from the sea, while those west of the mountains use rock salt. There are also places in Lingnan in the far south and in the deserts of the far north

which have long produced salt. In general, the same is true of other products as well.

To sum up, the region of Chu and Yue is broad and sparsely populated, and the people live on rice and fish soups. They burn off the fields and flood them to kill the weeds, and are able to gather all the fruit, berries, and uni-valve and bi-valve shellfish they want without waiting for merchants to come around selling them. Since the land is so rich in edible products, there is no fear of famine, and therefore the people are content to live along from day to day; they do not lay away stores of goods, and many of them are poor. As a result, in the region south of the Yangtze and Huai rivers no one ever freezes or starves to death, but on the other hand there are no very wealthy families.

The region north of the Zhe and Si rivers is suitable for growing the five types of grain, mulberries, and hemp, and for raising the six kinds of domestic animals.[13] Land is scarce and the population dense, and the area often suffers from floods and drought. The people therefore take good care to lay away stores of food. Hence in the regions of Qin, Xia, Liang, and Lu agriculture is favoured and the peasants are held in esteem. The same is true of Hedong, Henei and Henan, as well as Yuan and Chen, though in these regions the people also engage in trade. The people of Qi and Zhao with their intelligence and cleverness are always on the lookout for a chance to make a profit. Those of Yan and Dai gain their living from their fields and herds of domestic animals, and also raise silkworms.

Judging from all that has been said above, when wise men lay their profound plans in palace chambers or deliberate in audience halls, guard their honour and die for their principles, or when gentlemen retire to dwell in mountain caves and establish a reputation for purity of conduct, what is their ultimate objective? Their objective is simply wealth. So the honest official after years of service attains riches, and the honest merchant in the end becomes wealthy.

The desire for wealth does not need to be taught; it is an integral part of all human nature. Hence, when young men in the army attack cities and scale walls, break through the enemy lines and drive back the foe, cut down the opposing generals and seize their pennants, advance beneath a rain of arrows and stones, and do not turn aside before the horrors of fire and boiling water, it is because they are spurred on by the prospect of rich rewards. Again, when the youths of the lanes and alleys attack passers-by or murder them and hide their bodies,

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[13] Horses, cattle, pigs, goats, dogs, and chickens. Dogs were raised to be eaten.

threaten others and commit evil deeds, dig up graves and coin counterfeit money, form gangs to bully others, lend each other a hand in avenging wrongs, and think up secret ways to blackmail people or drive them from the neighbourhood, paying no heed to the laws and prohibitions, but rushing headlong to the place of execution, it is in fact all because of the lure of money. In like manner, when the women of Zhao and the maidens of Zheng paint their faces and play upon the large lute, flutter their long sleeves and trip about in pointed slippers, invite with their eyes and beckon with their hearts, considering it no distance at all to travel 1,000 miles to meet a patron, not caring whether he is old or young, it is because they are after riches. When idle young noblemen ornament their caps and swords and go about with a retinue of carriages and horsemen, it is simply to show off their wealth. Those who go out to shoot birds with stringed arrows, to fish or to hunt, heedless of dawn or nightfall, braving frost and snow, galloping around the animal pits or into ravines without shying from the dangers of wild beasts, do so because they are greedy for the taste of fresh game. The reason that those who indulge in gambling, horse racing, cock fighting, and dog racing turn red in the face, shouting boasts to one another, and invariably quarrel over the victory is that they consider it a very serious matter to lose their wagers. Doctors, magicians, and all those who live by their arts are willing to burn up their spirits and exhaust their talents only because they value the fees they will receive. When officials in the government juggle with phrases and twist the letter of the law, carve fake seals and forge documents, heedless of the mutilating punishments of the knife and saw that await them if they are discovered, it is because they are drowned in bribes and gifts. And when farmers, craftsmen, traders, and merchants lay away stores and work to expand their capital, we may be sure that it is because they are seeking wealth and hope to increase their goods. Thus men apply all their knowledge and use all their abilities simply in accumulating money. They never have any strength left over to consider the question of giving some of it away.

The proverb says, "You don't go 100 miles to peddle firewood; you don't go 1,000 miles to deal in grain. If you are going to be in a place for one year, then seed it with grain. If you are going to be there ten years, plant trees. And if you are going to be there 100 years, provide for the future by means of virtue." Virtue here means being good to people. Now there are men who receive no ranks or emoluments from the government and who have no revenue from titles or fiefs, and yet they enjoy just as much ease as those who have all these; they may be called the "untitled nobility". A lord who possesses a fief lives off the

taxes. Each year he is allowed to collect 200 cash from each household, so that the lord of 1,000 households has an income of 200,000 cash. But out of this he has to pay the expenses of his spring and autumn visits to the court and pay for various gifts and presentations. Common people such as farmers, craftsmen, travelling traders, and merchants on the whole may expect a profit of 2,000 cash a year on a capital investment of 10,000. So if a family has a capital investment of 1,000,000 cash, their income will likewise be 200,000. Out of this they must pay the cost of commutation of labour and military services, as well as property and poll taxes, but with the rest they may buy whatever fine food and clothing they desire.

Thus it is said that those who own pasture lands producing fifty horses a year, or 100 head of cattle, or 500 sheep, or 500 marshland swine; those who own reservoirs stocked with 1,000 piculs of fish or mountain lands containing 1,000 logs of timber; those who have 1,000 jujube trees in Anyi, or 1,000 chestnut trees in Yan or Qin, or 1,000 citrus trees in Shu, Han, or Jiangling, or 1,000 catalpas north of the Huai River or south of Changshan in the region of the Yellow and Qi rivers; those who own 1,000 *mu* of lacquer trees in Chen or Xia, 1,000 *mu* of mulberries or hemp in Qi or Lu, or 1,000 *mu* of bamboo along the Wei River; those who own farmlands in the suburbs of some famous capital or large city which produce one *zhong*[14] of grain per *mu*, or those who own 1,000 *mu* of gardenias or madder for dyes, or 1,000 beds of ginger or leeks — all these may live just as well as a marquis enfeoffed with 1,000 households. Commodities such as these are in fact the sources of considerable wealth. Their owners need not visit the market place or travel about to other cities but may simply sit at home and wait for the money to come in. They may live with all the dignity of retired gentlemen and still enjoy an income.

At the other extreme, when it comes to those impoverished men with aged parents and wives and children too weak or young to help them out, who have nothing to offer their ancestors at the seasonal sacrifices, who must depend upon the gifts and contributions of the community for their food and clothing and are unable to provide for themselves — if men such as these, reduced to such straits,

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[14] One *zhong* is equal to ten *hu*, or about five and a half U.S. bushels. One *mu* at this time was probably about 0.114 acres. The units used in this list are often obscure, and commentators disagree on their interpretation. Throughout the chapter I have followed the interpretations given by Professor Miyazaki Ichisada in his article, in Japanese, "A Price-list in the Biographies of Millionaires in the *Shi ji*", *Miscellanea Kiotensia* (Kyoto University, 1956), pp. 451-74.

still fail to feel any shame or embarrassment, then they hardly deserve to be called human. Therefore, when men have no wealth at all, they live by their brawn; when they have a little, they struggle to get ahead by their brains; and when they already have plenty of money, they look for an opportunity for a good investment. This in general is the way things work.

When it comes to making a living, the wise man will look around for some way to gain an income that does not involve any personal danger. Hence the best kind of wealth is that which is based upon agriculture, the next best is that which is derived from secondary occupations, and the worst of all is that which is acquired by evil means. But if a man is not a gentleman of unusual character who has deliberately sought retirement from the world, and if he grows old in poverty and lowliness and still insists upon talking about his "benevolence and righteousness", he ought to be thoroughly ashamed of himself.

As for the ordinary lot of tax-paying commoners, if they are confronted by someone whose wealth is ten times their own, they will behave with humility; if by someone whose wealth is 100 times their own, they will cringe with fear; if by someone whose wealth is 1,000 times their own, they will undertake to work for him; and if by someone whose wealth is 10,000 times their own, they will become his servants. This is the principle of things.

It is said, "If a man is trying to work his way up from poverty to riches, then farming is not as good as handicrafts, and handicrafts are not as good as trade; embroidering lovely patterns at home is not as good as lounging about the market gate." This means that the secondary occupations are the best source of wealth for a poor man.

Anyone who in the market towns or great cities manages in the course of a year to sell the following items: 1,000 brewings of liquor; 1,000 jars of pickles and sauces; 1,000 jars of syrups; 1,000 slaughtered cattle, sheep, and swine; 1,000 *zhong* of grain; 1,000 cartloads or 1,000 boat-lengths of firewood and stubble for fuel; 1,000 logs of timber; 10,000 bamboo poles; 100 horse carriages; 1,000 two-wheeled ox carts; 1,000 lacquered wooden vessels; brass utensils weighing 30,000 catties; 1,000 piculs of plain wooden vessels, iron vessels, or gardenia and madder dyes; 200 horses; 500 cattle; 2,000 sheep or swine; 100 male or female slaves; 1,000 catties of tendons, horns, or cinnabar; 30,000 catties of silken fabric, raw silk, or other fine fabrics; 1,000 rolls of embroidered or patterned silk; 1,000 piculs of fabrics made of vegetable fiber or raw or tanned hides; 1,000 pecks of lacquer; 1,000 jars of leaven or salted bean relish; 1,000 catties of globefish or mullet; 1,000 piculs of dried fish; 30,000 catties of salted

fish; 3,000 piculs of jujubes or chestnuts; 1,000 skins of fox or sable; 1,000 piculs of lamb or sheep skins; 1,000 felt mats; or 1,000 *zhong* of fruits or vegetables — such a man may live as well as the master of an estate of 1,000 chariots. The same applies for anyone who has 1,000 strings of cash (i.e., 1,000,000 cash) to lend out on interest. Such loans are made through a money-lender, but a greedy merchant who is too anxious for a quick return will only manage to revolve his working capital three times while a less avaricious merchant has revolved his five times. These are the principal ways of making money. There are various other occupations which bring in less than twenty percent profit, but they are not what I would call sources of wealth.

Now I should like to describe briefly the ways in which some of the worthy men of the present age, working within an area of 1,000 miles, have managed to acquire wealth, so that later generations may see how they did it and select what may be of benefit to themselves.

The ancestors of the Zhuo family of Shu were natives of Zhao who made a fortune by smelting iron. When the Qin armies overthrew the state of Zhao, the family was ordered to move to another part of the empire for resettlement. Having been taken captive and plundered of all their wealth and servants, the husband and wife were left to make the move alone, pushing their belongings in a cart. All of the other captives who were forced to move and who had a little wealth left vied with each other in bribing the officials to send them to some nearby location, and they were therefore allowed to settle in Jiameng. But Mr. Zhuo said, "This region is too narrow and barren. I have heard that at the foot of Mt. Min there are fertile plains full of edible tubers so that one may live all his life without suffering from famine. The people there are clever at commerce and make their living by trade." He therefore asked to be sent to a distant region, and was ordered to move to Linqiong. He was overjoyed, and when he got there and found a mountain which yielded iron ore, he began smelting ore and laying other plans to accumulate wealth until soon he dominated the trade among the people of Dian and Shu. He grew so rich that he owned 1,000 young slaves, and the pleasures he indulged in among his fields and lakes and on his bird and animal hunts were like those of a great lord.

Cheng Zheng, like Mr Zhuo, was one of those taken captive east of the mountains by the Qin armies and forced to resettle in the far west. He too engaged in the smelting industry and carried on trade with the barbarians who wear their hair in the mallet-shaped fashion. His wealth equalled that of Mr Zhuo, and the two of them lived in Linqiong.

The ancestors of the Kong family of Yuan were men of Liang who made their living by smelting iron. When Qin overthrew the state of Liang, the Kong family was moved to Nanyang, where they began smelting iron with bellows on a large scale and laying out ponds and fields. Soon they were riding about in carriages with a mounted retinue and visiting the feudal lords, and from these contacts they were able to earn large profits in trade. They also won a reputation for handing out lavish gifts in the manner of noblemen of leisure, but at the same time the profits they derived from their business were surprisingly large — far larger, in fact, then those derived by more cautious and tightfisted merchants — and the family fortune eventually reached several thousand catties of gold. Therefore the traders of Nanyang all imitated the Kong family's lordly and openhanded ways.

Lu people are customarily cautious and miserly, but the Bing family of Cao were particularly so. They started out by smelting iron and in time accumulated a fortune of 100,000,000 cash. All the members of the family from the father and elder brothers down to the sons and grandsons, however, made a promise that they would

> Never look down without picking up something useful;
> Never look up without grabbing something of value.

They travelled about to all the provinces and kingdoms, selling goods on credit, lending money and trading. It was because of their influence that so many people in Zou and Lu abandoned scholarship and turned to the pursuit of profit.

The people of Qi generally despise slaves, but Diao Xian alone valued them and appreciated their worth. Most men worry in particular about slaves who are too cunning and clever, but Diao Xian gladly acquired all he could of this kind and put them to work for him, sending them out to make a profit peddling fish and salt. Though he travelled about in a carriage with a mounted retinue and consorted with governors of provinces and prime ministers of kingdoms, he came to rely more and more upon his slaves, and in the end managed by their labour to acquire a fortune of 20,000,000 or 30,000,000 cash. Hence the saying, "Is it better to have a title in the government or to work for Diao Xian?" which means that he made it possible for his best slaves to enrich themselves while at the same time he utilized their abilities to the fullest.

The people of the old state of Zhou have always been very close in money matters, but Shi Shi was an extreme example. With a couple of hundred cartloads of goods he travelled around to the various provinces and kingdoms peddling

his wares; there was absolutely no place he did not go. The city of Luoyang is situated right in the middle of the old states of Qi, Qin, Chu, and Zhao, and even the poor people of the town study to become apprentices to the rich families, boasting to each other about how long they have been in trade and how they have several times passed by their old homes but were too busy to go in the gate. By making use of men like this in his business, Shi Shi was finally able to accumulate a fortune of 70,000,000 cash.

The ancestor of the Ren family of Xuanqu was an official in charge of the granary at Dudao. When the Qin dynasty was overthrown and the leaders of the revolt were all scrambling for gold and jewels, Mr Ren quietly dug a hole and stored away the grain that had been in his charge. Later, when the armies of Chu and Han were stalemated at Xingyang and the people were unable to plough their fields and plant their crops, the price of grain rose to 10,000 cash a picul, and all the gold and jewels of the great leaders soon found their way into the hands of Mr Ren. This was the start of the Ren family fortune. But while other rich people were outdoing each other in luxurious living, the Ren family lived very frugally and devoted all their energies to farming and animal raising. And while most people try to buy the cheapest fields and pasture lands, the Ren family bought up only those that were really valuable and of good quality. Thus the family remained wealthy for several generations. Mr Ren made all the members of the family promise that they would not eat or wear anything that was not produced from their own fields or herds, and that none of them would dare to drink wine or eat meat until their public services had been completed. Because of this rule they became the leaders of the community and, while continuing to be wealthy, enjoyed the respect of the ruler.

When the frontier was expanded and the border regions opened, only Qiao Tao took advantage of the opportunity, acquiring resources calculated at 1,000 horses, twice that number of cattle, 10,000 sheep, and 10,000 *zhong* of grain.

When Wu, Chu, and the other kingdoms, seven in all, raised their revolt in the time of Emperor Jing, the feudal lords in Chang'an made preparations to join the imperial armies in putting down the rebellion and began looking around for ways to borrow money to provide for the expedition. The moneylenders, considering that the fiefs and kingdoms of the feudal lords were all located east of the mountains and that the fate of that region was still a matter of grave doubt, were unwilling to lend them any money. Only one man, a Mr Wuyan, consented to lend them 1,000 catties of gold at an interest of ten times the amount of the loan. By the end of three months the states of Wu and Chu had been brought

under control, and within the year Mr Wuyan received his tenfold interest. As a result he became one of the richest men in the area within the Pass.

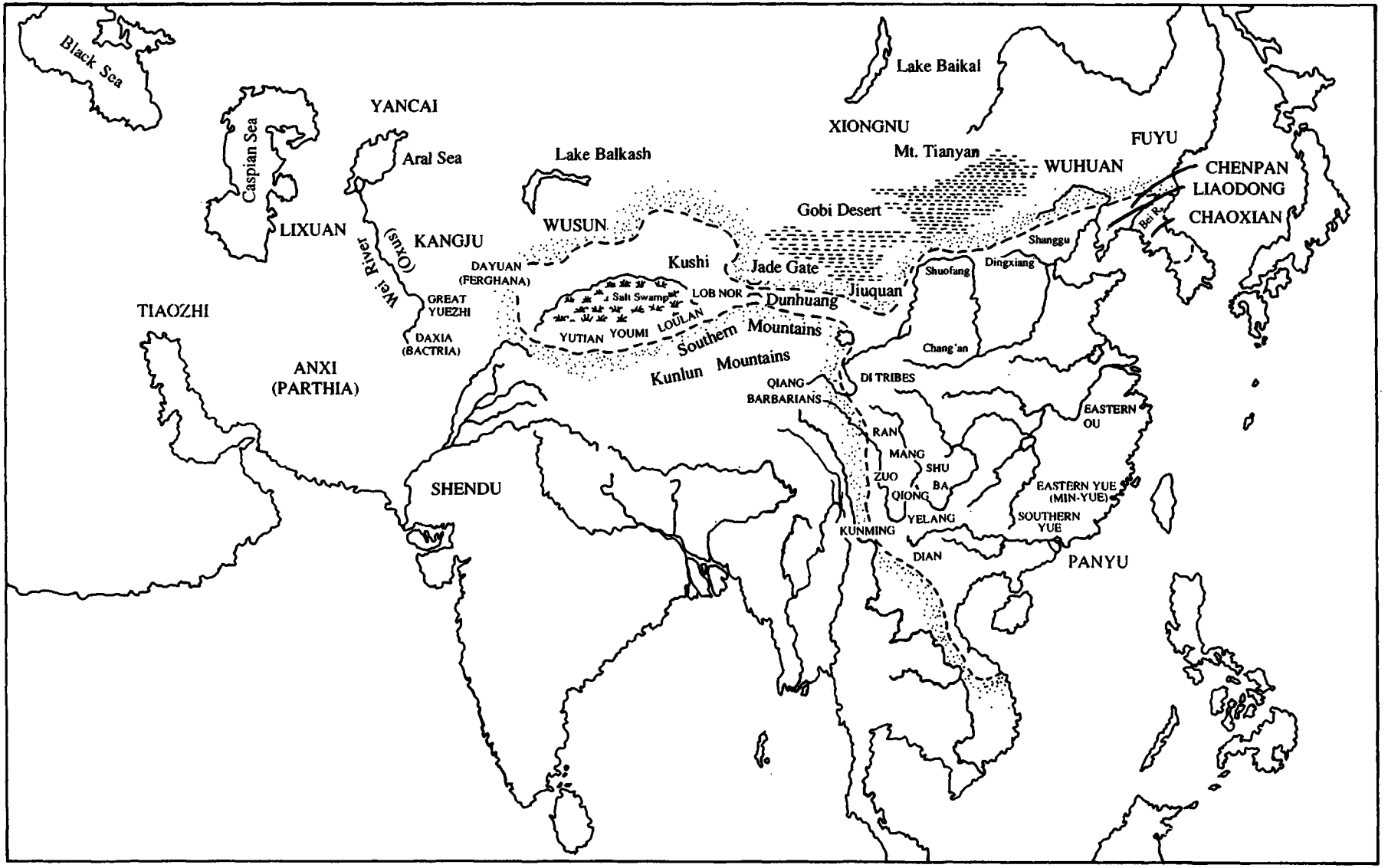
Most of the rich merchants and big traders of the area within the Pass belonged to the Tian family, such as Tian Se and Tian Lan. In addition, the Li family of Weijia and the Du families of Anling and Du also had fortunes amounting to 100,000,000 cash.

These, then, are examples of outstanding and unusually wealthy men. None of them enjoyed any titles or fiefs, gifts, or salaries from the government, nor did they play tricks with the law or commit any crimes to acquire their fortunes. They simply guessed what course conditions were going to take and acted accordingly, kept a sharp eye out for the opportunities of the times, and so were able to capture a fat profit. They gained their wealth in the secondary occupations and held on to it by investing in agriculture; they seized hold of it in times of crisis and maintained it in times of stability. There was a special aptness in the way they adapted to the times, and therefore their stories are worth relating. In addition, there are many other men who exerted themselves at farming, animal raising, crafts, lumbering, merchandising, and trade and seized the opportunities of the moment to make a fortune, the greatest of them dominating a whole province, the next greatest dominating a district, and the smallest dominating a village, but they are too numerous to be described here.

Thrift and hard work are without doubt the proper way to gain a livelihood. And yet it will be found that rich men have invariably employed some unusual scheme or method to get to the top. Ploughing the fields is a rather crude way to make a living, and yet Qin Yang did so well at it that he became the richest man in his province. Robbing graves is a criminal offence, but Tian Shu got his start by doing it. Gambling is a wicked pastime, but Huan Fa used it to acquire a fortune. Most fine young men would despise the thought of travelling around peddling goods, yet Yong Lecheng got rich that way. Many people would consider trading in fats a disgraceful line of business, but Yong Bo made 1,000 catties of gold at it. Vending syrups is a petty occupation, but the Zhang family acquired 10,000,000 cash that way. It takes little skill to sharpen knives, but because the Zhi family didn't mind doing it, they could eat the best of everything. Dealing in dried sheep stomachs seems like an insignificant enough trade, but thanks to it the Zhuo family went around with a mounted retinue. The calling of a horse doctor is a rather ignominious profession, but it enabled Zhang Li to own a house so large that he had to strike a bell to summon the servants. All of

these men got where they did because of their devotion and singleness of purpose.

From this we may see that there is no fixed road to wealth, and money has no permanent master. It finds its way to the man of ability like the spokes of a wheel converging upon the hub, and from the hands of the worthless it falls like shattered tiles. A family with 1,000 catties of gold may stand side by side with the lord of a city; the man with 100,000,000 cash may enjoy the pleasures of a king. Rich men such as these deserve to be called the "untitled nobility", do they not?



CHINA AND ITS NEIGHBOURS IN THE FORMER HAN

Based on Yanai Watari, *Tōyō dokushi chizu* (Tokyo, Fuzambō, 1931), map 7. The dotted line indicates the extent of Han power under Emperor Wu. Names of countries and bodies of water not mentioned by Sima Qian and therefore probably unknown to him do not appear on this map. There is some doubt as to which part of India was meant by the Chinese name "Shendu".